



# The Mau Mau: Myths and Misrepresentations in US News Media

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## Abstract

The purpose of this research is to analyze the meanings and ideas evoked by discourses on Africa and the Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya in The New York Times (NYT) in order to demonstrate structural biases and operating frameworks that perpetuate negative attitudes towards Africa by representing Africa as synonymous with terror, hopelessness, and conflict. These representations are perpetrated by stereotypes and myths, the four Structural Media biases, and colonial discourses. These biases, in turn, make it difficult to present news from Africa in ways that counter stereotypical ideas. This research paper provides the case of media coverage of the Mau Mau movement in 1950s Kenya, which focused on discrediting the movement by representing them as terrorists, a criminal enterprise, and with links to communism, while never properly explaining the movement. Elite United States (US) newspapers saw national liberation movements as products of the communist influence that threatened US interests post-World War II. This analysis utilizes a methodology rooted in genealogical media approaches, media and post-colonialist theory, structural media framework biases, and African political thought. Such trends help visualize representations of the Mau Mau Uprising and Africa as continuous, while advancing the claim that US news media prioritized the delegitimization of the Mau Mau Uprising. The implications of these representations are the shifting behavior and cultural attitudes towards Africa, and more specifically Kenya. The media's framework made it possible to continue to misrepresent and underrepresent Africa several decades after most African countries had already achieved independence.

**Keywords:** Mau Mau Uprising; Afro-Pessimism; Post-Colonial Theory; Media Theory; Colonial Discourse; The New York Times

## 1. Introduction

I analyzed media discourses from the *NYT* about Africa during the 1950s and post-colonial rule (post-60s) to find out why Africa has been represented as synonymous with terror, conflict, and hopelessness over time by elite US news media. This research will help understand how representations of African national liberation struggles in US media impact African voices and agency as they are subjected to a detrimental and often false single-story narrative. Throughout history, Africa has often been portrayed in Western media through a single-story narrative.<sup>1</sup> For centuries, the continent has been depicted as a poor, aid-dependent, disease-ridden, unstable, resource-cursed, hopeless and a war-torn 'dark continent'.<sup>2</sup> This one-dimensional depiction was created by colonial institutions to perpetuate white supremacy and Western domination of the African continent, and has not been challenged by the Western media.<sup>3</sup> To this day, these ideas continue to permeate the perspectives of Western journalists and academics when writing about Africa.<sup>4</sup>

An investigation of the discourses on Africa in US news media seeks to advance the claim that representations of the Mau Mau Uprising shifted following Kenyan independence from British colonial rule. In order to investigate this, I have reviewed literature regarding representations of the Mau Mau Uprising and Africa in US news media, mainly in *The NYT* before and after colonial rule. This encompasses the studies of media discourse analysis specialists who engage with the nuances of symbols and themes within US news media coverage. Through my analysis of media coverage in *The NYT* of the Mau Mau Uprising during 1950s and 60s Kenya, I found that the discourses focused on discrediting the movement by representing them as terrorists, a criminal enterprise, and with links to communism, while never properly explaining the movement.

I applied media and postcolonial theory, as well as mass media communication theory to my research in order to provide a conceptual framework in which the relationship between representations in media and an audience is explored. For the case of the Mau Mau, elite US newspapers saw national liberation movements as products of the radical communist influence that threatened US interests post-World War II. These representations, in addition to defining the parameters of discourse on national liberation struggles, continued to perpetuate negative views of Africa in the post-colonial period.<sup>5</sup> These representations of the Mau Mau movement were reinforced in its early stages by a series of political and religious awakenings, which the colonial authorities characterized as seditious; in reality this was not the case. Despite the misconception and portrayal of the Mau-Mau as "terrorists" and "irrational," they maintained a specific craft to their disruption.<sup>6</sup> However, the combination of the already entrenched stereotypes and myths regarding Africa and the media's framework made it possible to continue to misrepresent and underrepresent Africa several decades after most African countries had already achieved independence.

## 2. Literature Review

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<sup>1</sup> Chibuiké Oguh, "The Representation of Africa in Western Media: Still a 21st Century Problem" (2015), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Amy E Harth, "Representations of Africa in the Western News Media: Reinforcing Myths and Stereotypes," n.d., 77.

<sup>3</sup> Chimamanda Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story" (2009). *TED Talks*.

[http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.html)

<sup>4</sup> Roy Richard Grinker, Stephen C. Lubkemann, and Christopher B. Steiner, "Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History and Representation" (John Wiley & Sons, 2010): 309.

<sup>5</sup> Fair, Jo Ellen. "Are We Really the World: Coverage of U.S. Food Aid in Africa", *1980-1989 Africa's Media Image*. Ed. Beverly G. Hawk. New York: Praeger, 1992. 109.

<sup>6</sup> Mwangi Wa-Githumo, "The Truth About The Mau Mau Movement: The Most Popular Uprising In Kenya," *Transafrican Journal of History* 20 (1991): 16.

The primary schools of thought that emerged regard the use of media as a cultural signifier and apply three distinct lenses of analysis. These are Media Theory, the Postcolonial Theory, and Afro-Pessimism. The analysis I will illustrate expresses how the features of these discourses combine to produce particular meanings that give rise to a neo-colonial racist representation of Africa and Africans. The role of biased discourse in reproducing the racist representations of Africa and Africans in Western society, and in maintaining Western hegemony, will be discussed. This discourse is investigated through existing scholarship and auxiliary models of critical rhetoric application and critical social theory. These investigations contribute to the framing of findings presented by noted researchers, hence furthering an understanding of the meanings and ideas evoked by US news media in regard to dominant representations of Africa.

## 2.1 Media Theory

Media theory refers to the complex of social-political-philosophical principles which organize ideas about the relationship between media and society.<sup>7</sup> Contextualizing the discourse on Africa is contingent upon understanding how the US news coverage serves as an indicator of societal values and priorities.<sup>8</sup> Media as a cultural influence is explored via mass communication theory, which dictates that media is pervasive and propagates a “general view of reality over time.”<sup>9</sup> The long-standing critique of Western media coverage of Africa in media and communication studies has been concerned with the perceived failure of Western media to offer a balanced representation of Africa.<sup>10</sup> The occasional coverage rooted within Africa is often represented through a Eurocentric and ethnocentric lens, rendering the narrative distorted or inaccurate.<sup>11</sup> The application of media theory and mass media communication theory to my research provides a conceptual framework in which the relationship between representations in media and an audience is explored, justifying research regarding the role of mass media as a mechanism to influence societal beliefs.

Media effects stemming from media theory continue to perpetuate stereotypes, glorify behaviors, and encourage unhealthy habits.<sup>12</sup> While often indirect, the short and long-term effects that occur within-person are changes in cognitions, which include beliefs, emotions, attitudes, and behavior that result from media use.<sup>13</sup> The African colonial experience, especially as it relates to the mass media, contradicts a monolithic reading of European colonial language policy.<sup>14</sup> Due to media infrastructures, practices and policies embedded in the prevailing networks, the media plays a role in developing complex and contradictory information.<sup>15</sup> Media effects from media theory help visualize how Africa in US media is constructed through metaphor. The metaphors selected to represent Africa in US news stem

<sup>7</sup> “Normative Media Theory in the Digital Media Landscape: From Media Ethics to Ethical Communication: Vol 43, No 2,” accessed April 1, 2020, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02500167.2017.1331927>.

<sup>8</sup> Fred Inglis, *Media Theory* (Oxford, UK; BBlackwell, 1990): 19.

<sup>9</sup> Kitzinger, Jenny. “The Debate About Media Influence.” In *Framing Abuse: Media Influence and Public Understanding of Sexual Violence Against Children*. (Pluto Books, 2004). 13.

<sup>10</sup> Séverine Autesserre, “Dangerous Tales: Dominant Narratives on The Congo and their Unintended Consequences,” *African Affairs* 111, no. 443 (2012): 219.

<sup>11</sup> Toussaint Nothias, “‘Rising’, ‘Hopeful’, ‘New’: Visualizing Africa in the Age of Globalization:,” *Visual Communication*, July 14, 2014: 1140.

<sup>12</sup> Mary Beth Oliver, Arthur A. Raney, and Jennings Bryant, *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research* (Milton, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 316. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aul/detail.action?docID=5798096>.

<sup>13</sup> Patti M. Valkenburg, Jochen Peter, and Joseph B. Walther, “Media Effects: Theory and Research,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 67, no. 1 (2016): 321.

<sup>14</sup> Alamin Mazrui, “Language And The Media In Africa: Between The Old Empire And The New” *International African Seminars* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2009): 37.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, “The Media In Social Development In Contemporary Africa,” *International African Seminars* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2009): 19.

from stereotypes that have permeated Western culture. The predominant scholarship analyzes how the media thus misrepresents Africa. Similarly, trends for more positive coverage of Africa—presented as a remedy to the “traditional” negative representations—is often related to the trickling down of a corporate discourse that favors neoliberal policies and extractive, exploitative economies.<sup>16</sup> By constantly relying on the assumption that we know what Western media coverage of Africa is like, it brings up worries that academic research becomes “embroiled in the exercise of hegemonic power”.<sup>17</sup> This provides a conceptual framework for my research in which the relationship between what is covered in US news and the realities is filtered through entrenched myths and stereotypes rooted in colonial and ethno-centric perspectives.

While the misrepresentation of Africa in the media is usually an unconscious practice, the negative portrayal of Africa by the US media is a systematic process that is created and sustained by the four structural media biases. These are The Personalization Bias, The Dramatization Bias, The Fragmentation Bias, and The Authority-Disorder Bias.<sup>18</sup> Encountering Africa through such biases allows the continent to be misrepresented as a colonialist success story. Myths and stereotypes become increasingly difficult to extricate from language, thought and from the very structure of this media, which makes it difficult to present news that counters these ideas.<sup>19</sup>

## 2.2 Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory takes many different forms, but all share a fundamental claim: the world is impossible to understand except in relation to the history of imperialism and colonial rule.<sup>20</sup> The term ‘postcolonial’ refers to a disparate body of knowledge whose ‘post’ refers to a particular temporal meaning: a condition after colonialism although there is no single point where colonialism formally ceased.<sup>21</sup> In this case, the temporal meaning will be post-1960s. Scholars offer postcolonial theory as a way to explain representations of Africa as synonymous with poverty, wars, and helplessness. The media’s role in representing Africa is definitive because of its power in reinforcing myths and stereotypes which might otherwise be difficult to sustain.<sup>22</sup> Their misrepresentation becomes the primary or only representation of the continent and are often synonymous with danger, darkness, violence, poverty, and hopelessness.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, many Westerners view Africa as a jungle or desert landscape where the people speak unintelligible languages.<sup>24</sup> This, in turn, furthers the internalized attitude of ethnic or cultural inferiority felt by people as a result of colonization.

Postcolonialism is a broad theoretical approach that examines the past and present impact of colonialism and racism on social, political, and economic systems.<sup>25</sup> It focuses on the ways

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<sup>16</sup> Toussaint Nothias, “‘Rising’, ‘Hopeful’, ‘New’: Visualizing Africa in the Age of Globalization:,” *Visual Communication*, July 14, 2014, 1145, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357214530063>.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Scott, “The Myth of Representations of Africa,” *Journalism Studies* 18, no. 2 (February 1, 2017): 191–210, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1044557>.

<sup>18</sup> Bennett, W. Lance. “News: The Politics of Illusion”. New York: Pearson, 2009: 40.

<sup>19</sup> Harth, “Representations of Africa in the Western News Media: Reinforcing Myths and Stereotypes.”: 2.

<sup>20</sup> Oxford Bibliographies, “Postcolonial Theory - Literary and Critical Theory - Oxford Bibliographies - Obo,” accessed March 6, 2020, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0069.xml>.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Westwood, and Jack, G, ‘Manifesto for a Post-colonial International Business and Management Studies: A Provocation’, *Critical Perspectives on International Business* 3(3): 246, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Amy E Harth, “Representations of Africa in the Western News Media: Reinforcing Myths and Stereotypes,” n.d., 9.

<sup>23</sup> Eytan Gilboa, “The CNN Effect: The Search for a Communication Theory of International Relations,” *Political Communication* 22, no. 1 (February 16, 2005): 41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600590908429>.

<sup>24</sup> Michael McCarthy, *Dark Continent: Africa as Seen by Americans*, Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies, No. 75 (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1983).

<sup>25</sup> “Postcolonialism,” in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, by Lisa Given (2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks California 91320 United States: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2008), 651.

particular groups of people, because of notions of race or ethnicity, have been excluded, marginalized, and represented in ways that devalue or even dehumanize them. Postcolonial theorists not only examine the position of people who have been colonized but also analyze the impact that the process of colonialism has on those people who benefited from colonial acts, such as dispossession, violence, and the promotion of racist ideology.<sup>26</sup> Incorporating postcolonial theoretical frameworks into media studies expands its in productive ways.<sup>27</sup> This provides a crucial contribution to this research as it highlights the underlying logics of knowledge, established in various disciplines, which have attempted to universalize their Eurocentric assumptions.<sup>28</sup> This, in turn, furthers the internalized attitude of ethnic or cultural inferiority felt by people as a result of colonization, like was the case in the coverage of The Mau Mau Uprising. Moreover, postcolonial studies address the importance of media, popular culture, and technology in understanding colonialism.<sup>29</sup> Scholars in this group emphasize that media studies need to engage postcolonial frameworks to challenge the US news media centered Eurocentric temporalities that have been assumed in much of media scholarship, and it needs to do so beyond just an additive and apolitical “de-Westernizing” impulse.

### 2.3 Afro-Pessimism

As a pillar of my research, Afro-Pessimism allows us to critique the orientation of US news coverage of Africa and the Mau Mau Uprising, and how such discourse fails to accurately encompass the Black position. For instance, nowhere else is this so apparent than in Western news flow studies mapping out what has become known as the Afro-pessimism image of the so-called “dark continent”.<sup>30</sup> There is a need for more accurate and holistic coverage of Africa, as it seems that both media coverage and news flow studies have remained stuck in the view of Africa as the “hopeless continent”.<sup>31</sup> These hierarchies of power are especially present within the dependency theory.<sup>32</sup>

Representations of Africa in western mainstream media have been the object of scholarly inquiry for many years, leading to well-known critiques on the dominant Afro-pessimistic discourse and the discursive construction of Africa as an inferior, dark continent. In order to fully understand this pessimistic discourse, it is necessary to refer to Saïd’s theory of Orientalism and Mudimbe’s notion of Africanism.<sup>33</sup> These two scholars have criticized the ideologies of ‘Otherness’ that were developed during the age of Western imperialism and European colonization.<sup>34</sup> Particularly, they demonstrated how Western discourses on non-Western parts of the world serve the West in maintaining its power by representing the distant ‘Other’ as inferior.<sup>35</sup> Since the 1800s, Africa has been represented by dominant Western ‘pre-existing categories of thought’, which in turn have constructed a pessimistic view of Africa as ‘passive’ and ‘hopeless’.<sup>36</sup> These scholars emphasize the sociocultural polarization between

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid. 652

<sup>27</sup> María Fernández, “Postcolonial Media Theory,” *Art Journal*, May 7, 2014: 64.

<sup>28</sup>Raka Shome, “When Postcolonial Studies Meets Media Studies,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 33, no. 3 (August 2016): 246.

<sup>29</sup> Philip, K. (2005). “What is a technological author? The pirate function and intellectual property”, *Postcolonial Studies*, 8(2), 206.

<sup>30</sup> Patrick Chabal, (2008) “On Reason and Afro-Pessimism”, *Africa* 78(4), 608.

<sup>31</sup> John S. Saul, (2002) “Taming the Transition: the real Afro-pessimism”, *Politikon* 29,110.

<sup>32</sup> Patrick Bond, “8. The Political Economy of Africa and Dependency Theory,” *Wits University*, n.d., 67.

<sup>33</sup> Edward W. Said, “Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient”, *London: Routledge*, 1978.

<sup>34</sup> Ali Al’amin Mazrui, “The Re-Invention of Africa: Edward Said, V.Y. Mudimbe, and beyond. (Imperialism in Postcolonial Africa),” *Research in African Literatures* 36, no. 3: 68, 2005.

<sup>35</sup> Valentin-Yves, V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, African Systems of Thought The Invention of Africa (Place of publication not identified: Indiana University Press, 1988).

<sup>36</sup> Richard, Grinker, and Lubkemann, Steiner, “Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History & Representation - American University,” accessed March 7, 2020.

'us' and 'them' in Western news coverage, which echoes Said's Orientalism and further highlights an underlying hierarchy of power.

### 3. Methodology

The methodology is grounded in Foucault's genealogical and social constructivist approach in order to address concerns with power, knowledge, and discourse.<sup>37</sup> This genealogical approach confronts ideas or practices that present themselves as universal and evaluates the more limited meaning of the practices.<sup>38</sup> Ultimately, through this genealogical approach, I attempt to show that all practices have variable meanings and reflect different forces rather than possessing intrinsic meanings and pointing to a permanent reality.<sup>39</sup> Through a social constructivist approach, I accept the view of language as embedded within broader forms of life, for example, the language conventions for communicating about human motivation are linked to certain activities, objects, and settings.<sup>40</sup> Closely aligned with the pragmatic conception of knowledge, that is, traditional issues of truth and objectivity are replaced by concerns with that which research brings forth, I was able to draw sustenance from Michel Foucault's power-knowledge formulations. I was able to analyze the discontent and resistance shared within the broad spectrum of minorities. To do so, I used the NVivo codification system to analyze relationships between patterns, language, and systems of power and dominance by synthesizing attitudes towards the Mau Mau Uprising and meanings encoded through visual representations. In order to succeed with this method, it is essential to discuss and justify the representations that have been selected for mapping.

#### 3.1 Mapping Representations

Scholars have already identified discourses on the subjugation of ethnic minorities, poverty, and war.<sup>41</sup> I have additionally identified discourses on helplessness, security, and the subjugations of national liberation struggles to its sole roots being in communist ties and terrorist behaviors. To this end, I will map the representations of a selection of US news media, like *The NYT*, on the Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya during the 50s and post-Kenyan independence from British colonial rule.<sup>42</sup> These concepts will serve as nodal points that contribute to the construction of representations of Africa in which evident hierarchies of knowledge will be present as they normalize these discourses and representations within.<sup>43</sup> The discourses are produced by official US news media sources, which, in turn, contributes to another layer of discourse.<sup>44</sup>

The media gives us ways of imagining particular identities and groups which can have material effects on how people experience the world, and how they are understood or legislated for.<sup>45</sup> This, in turn, shows the way knowledge is produced and filled with powerful cultural and

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<sup>37</sup> Benjamin C. Sax, "Foucault, Nietzsche, History: Two Modes of the Genealogical Method," *History of European Ideas* 11, no. 1-6 (January 1, 1989): 771.

<sup>38</sup> Lisa Given, "Genealogical Approach," in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, 2008, 370.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 371.

<sup>40</sup> Lisa Given, "Social Constructionism," in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, 2008, 817.

<sup>41</sup> Toussaint Nothias, "How Western Journalists Actually Write About Africa: Re-Assessing the Myth of Representations of Africa," *Journalism Studies* 19, no. 8 (June 15, 2018): 1142.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* 1145.

<sup>43</sup> A. S. Cleary, "The Myth of Mau Mau in Its International Context," *African Affairs* 89, no. 355 (1990): 229.

<sup>44</sup> Eytan Gilboa, "The CNN Effect: The Search for a Communication Theory of International Relations," *Political Communication* 22, no. 1 (February 16, 2005): 35.

<sup>45</sup> Winston Mano, *Racism, Ethnicity and the Media in Africa: Mediating Conflict in the Twenty-First Century* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015).

ideological assumptions about what is normal or accepted as common knowledge.<sup>46</sup> Elite news media in the US, which includes *The NYT*, demonstrate structural biases and operating frameworks that perpetuate negative attitudes towards Africa.<sup>47</sup> These representations are created through stereotypes and myths, the four Structural Media biases, and colonial discourses. These, in turn, fuel the media's crisis news agenda while positive representations of Africa are delegitimized.

Media coverage of the Mau Mau movement in the 1950s focused on discrediting the movement by representing them as terrorists, a criminal enterprise, and with links to communism, while never properly explaining the movement. Because elite US newspapers saw national liberation movements as products of the communist influence that threatened US interests post-World War II.<sup>48</sup> These representations, in addition to defining the parameters of discourse on national liberation struggles, continued to perpetuate negative ways of seeing Africa in the post-colonial period.<sup>49</sup> There are hierarchies of knowledge when reporting on Africa, and therefore, there is a dominance of certain types of imagery and story angles in all mainstream media which, in turn, create and reinforce assumptions and structures of subjugation. These can also be seen through Hofstede's '6 cultural dimensions' where there are high levels of power distance, including the 'them' versus 'us' mentalities.<sup>50</sup> For example, the Mau Mau movement was represented as a descent into savagery, turning its fighters into "the face of international terrorism in the 1950s".<sup>51</sup> These representations were reinforced in its early stages by a series of political and religious awakenings which the colonial authorities characterized as seditious, when, in reality, this was not the case.<sup>52</sup> The additional identifiable discourses on hopelessness and language of violence play a role in the creation of systems of dominance and in creating hierarchies of knowledge.

### 3.2 Contextual Framework

One of the defining moments in journalism in Africa was the media's representation of the Mau Mau movement in Kenya in the 1950s. Between World War I and II, there developed deep sentiment within the ranks of some of Kenya's proto-nationalists that the political, economic and educational aspirations of the people of Kenya could never be realized short of organized armed action.<sup>53</sup> Between 1946 and 1952 this sentiment sparked the creation of a movement, which later came to be known as the Mau Mau. The history of the Mau Mau movement is, therefore, inextricably the history of the struggle for the return of all lands that had been expropriated from Kenya's agrarian and pastoral communities by European empire-builders, commercial companies and settlers.<sup>54</sup> To this very day, Mau Mau remains both an enigma and an embarrassment.<sup>55</sup> However, it is now recognized that the portrayal of the uprising as a rejection of civilization, an atavistic regression into barbarity, constituted essentially a 'myth', a propaganda exercise carried out by colonial authorities.

<sup>46</sup> Edward Ademolu, "Seeing and Being Development's 'Other': Representations of Africa and Diaspora Audiences |," *Africa at LSE* (blog), September 3, 2018, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2018/09/03/seeing-and-being-developments-other-representations-of-africa-and-diaspora-audiences/>.

<sup>47</sup> Oguh, "The Representation of Africa in Western Media," 22.

<sup>48</sup> F. Ugboaja Ohaegbulam, "The United States and Africa after the Cold War," *Africa Today* 39, no. 4 (1992): 19.

<sup>49</sup> Fair, Jo Ellen. "Are We Really the World: Coverage of U.S. Food Aid in Africa", *1980-1989 Africa's Media Image*. Ed. Beverly G. Hawk. New York: Praeger, 1992; 109.

<sup>50</sup> Hofstede Insights, "National Culture," accessed March 6, 2020, <https://hi.hofstede-insights.com/national-culture>.

<sup>51</sup> Boston University. "Highlighting Perspective: Who Were the Mau Mau?" [www.bu.edu/africa/files/2016/04/3.-Mau-Mau-Primary-Source-Perspectives.pdf](http://www.bu.edu/africa/files/2016/04/3.-Mau-Mau-Primary-Source-Perspectives.pdf).

<sup>52</sup> Mwangi Wa-Githumo, "The Truth About The Mau Mau Movement: The Most Popular Uprising In Kenya," *Transafrican Journal of History* 20 (1991): 5.

<sup>53</sup> Wa-Githumo, "The Truth About The Mau Mau Movement."

<sup>54</sup> Cleary, "The Myth of Mau Mau in Its International Context," 233.

<sup>55</sup> David M. Anderson, "Mau Mau at the Movies: Contemporary Representations of an Anti-Colonial War," *South African Historical Journal* 48, no. 1 (May 1, 2003): 78.

Expanding upon these representations in the broader historical context of 1950 to present-day provides a basis for the evaluation of the shift in discourse when covering the Mau Mau Uprising. In order to connect the two, it is essential to analyze how the discourses presented by the British colonial government, and later by US news media like *The NYT*, constructed meanings surrounding security and hopelessness. Primary source selection was contingent upon both the language it was written in (since I can only understand English, Spanish, and French), and the time period in which it was produced. For the purpose of investigating meanings associated with the content itself, I did not select primary sources that are written in Bantu Swahili language for analysis. Instead, I focused on English or French adaptations of stories by those involved in the Mau Mau Uprising or colonial forces on the ground. This decision was made given that my language scope is limited and I wanted to focus on the meanings produced by US newspapers since they had no direct ties to Kenya, only with Britain, and saw national liberation movements as products of the communist influence that threatened US interests post-World War II. Tracing representations of the aforementioned layers of discourse intertextually informs our understanding of what meanings are constructed, in that repeated patterns and cultural indicators become apparent across the board. Following the start of the Mau Mau Uprising in 1952, I have selected articles from *The NYT* between 1952-1963 and post-Kenyan independence to understand the situational meanings.

### 3.3 Generation of Evidence

In order to understand the situational meanings produced by *The NYT* in the given context of the 50s during the Mau Mau Uprising, and post-Kenyan independence in the 60s, I analyzed articles from both time periods. I have identified discourses on different attitudes towards Africa (supportive/hope and derogatory/hopelessness), darkness, security/risk discourses, language of violence/humanism, racism/generalizations, representations of Africa as continuous, and representations of the Mau Mau as terrorists, which I then made into these nodes. I mapped the representations from a selection of *The NYT* coverage of the Mau Mau Uprising in the 50s and post 60s which served as cases in NVivo to visualize the shift in construction of representations of the Mau Mau and of Africa within US news media. In order to allow for exposure to multiple meanings and to explore intertextuality among the texts, I pursued additional texts such as those present in *The Guardian (UK)* and *The Economist (UK)*, as the British played a key role in the dissemination of myths, stereotypes, and lies regarding the Mau Mau movement, which was then reciprocated by US media.

For this particular analysis, I examined newspaper coverage of the Mau Mau in relation to the social and cultural climate of America, Great Britain, and Kenya during the critical years of the Mau Mau movement, from September 1952 through 1956, and later the discourse post-Kenyan independence. The focus is on news stories, which I defined as any stories that are not editorials or op-eds, columns, briefs, or indexes. The most prominent themes of news stories are often reflected in the stories' headlines and subheads, and generally, headlines and subheads help guide how people read the stories.<sup>56</sup> All news stories are products of selections made by journalists and the emphasis they place on certain aspects of a situation while downplaying or ignoring others. This is reflected in language and the selection of various voices.<sup>57</sup> News writers and producers must make choices regarding whose voice to represent and whose to ignore or marginalize.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> James W. Tankard, "The Empirical Approach to the Study of Media Framing," in *Framing Public Life*, ed. Stephen D. Reese, Oscar H. Gandy Jr., and August E. Grant (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001), 99.

<sup>57</sup> Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1978), 105.

<sup>58</sup> Tankard, "The Empirical Approach to the Study of Media Framing," 106.

I selected *The NYT*, published in the less-involved US. As Great Britain was the colonial power ruling Kenya, it had an established political relationship with the territory and was the overseer of government. While the US had a far less substantial relationship with Kenya, other interests and worries were at play.<sup>59</sup> By comparing the coverage of the two time periods, I establish the variations and interpretations that appeared. One important thing to note is that *The NYT* coverage of the Mau Mau movement in the 50s tended to sensationalize the revolt, by highlighting murders and destruction, and had a specific inclination towards simplifying the situation. Many of the articles I used for my research consisted of only a couple of sentences or, at most, a few paragraphs. Finally, data analysis was conducted via NVivo, which classified data cases based on time period. I then created specific nodes, categorizing them as follows:

Attitude	Language-game	Security Risk	Othering	Colonialism	Africa as continuous
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**Figure 1: Nodal Classification**

The rationale for each node is as follows, *Attitude* was classified as *supportive (hope)* or *derogative (hopelessness)*. This is in reference to the author's attitude toward Africa when covering news, including the Mau Mau, and shifts could occur within different time periods. This shift is justified by the shifts in colonial propaganda methods in Kenya, and the realities of the Mau Mau movement coming to light once Kenya gained independence.<sup>60</sup> *Language-game* is classified by either *language of violence/barbarism* or *language of peace/humanism*.<sup>61</sup> This classification is justified by Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of "language-game" which showed that words can spark humanism or barbarism.<sup>62</sup> Language of violence includes the labelling of the Mau Mau as terrorists. *Security risk* is classified as something, like the Mau Mau Uprising, that may threaten American beliefs, security, peace, or ideologies. Although the language of risk is increasingly present in international politics, risk as a category of understanding has been under-theorized in IR and in security studies.<sup>63</sup> The revival of Mau Mau was a threat to the new political order both in colonial Kenya, England, and the US. *Othering*, or the subjugation of ethnic minorities, is a classification of behavior or appearance that distinguishes a person or group as inferior on account of their ethnicity. Factors that determine the "othering" of a person or group included the presentation of low intellect, impoverishment, and other racist generalizations. *Colonialism* is classified as a *pro-colonialism perspective* in writing or an *anti-colonial perspective*. The final node is *Africa as continuous*; this refers to generalizations labelling Africa as a single country, without the acknowledgement of the different countries, cultures, languages, religions, races, and other significant cultural variables. These nodes will help understand how these representations of Africa in news affect African voices, and negatively affect their agency as they are subjected to a detrimental single-story narrative.

#### 4. Analysis

<sup>59</sup> Melissa Tully, "All's Well in the Colony: Newspaper Coverage of the Mau Mau Movement, 1952–1956," January 200, accessed April 22, 2020.

<sup>60</sup> Myles Osborne, "The Rooting Out of Mau Mau from the Minds of the Kikuyu Is a Formidable Task: Propaganda and the Mau Mau War," *Journal of African History*; Cambridge 56, no. 1 (March 2015): 87.

<sup>61</sup> "The Austrian Philosopher Who Showed That Words Can Spark Humanism or Barbarism," *Zócalo Public Square*, January 31, 2018, <https://www.zocalopublicsquare.org/2018/01/31/austrian-philosopher-showed-words-can-spark-humanism-barbarism/ideas/essay/>.

<sup>62</sup> "Ludwig Wittgenstein (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)," accessed April 29, 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wittgenstein/>.

<sup>63</sup> Claudia Aradau, "The Perverse Politics of Four-Letter Words: Risk and Pity in the Securitisation of Human Trafficking," 2004, (accessed April 2, 2020), 264.

Within the colonial discourse on the Mau Mau Uprising presented in US news media between the 1950s and post-Kenyan independence in 1963, I have observed four patterns of representation emerge regarding the labeling of the Mau Mau. This advances Caroline Elkins' original claims about systematic violence and high-level cover-ups by the British in Kenya.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, this analysis introduces the notion that colonial propaganda affects the broader discourse, for which the academic consensus has previously determined that the Mau Mau has been historically misrepresented as the British falsified information regarding the movement.

The media representation of the Mau Mau movement focused on several aspects intended to discredit the rebels. First, the revolt was framed as a criminal enterprise.<sup>65</sup> Second, the media labeled the movement as a terrorist group.<sup>66</sup> Third, the Mau Mau was imagined as a secret society with links to communism and gave a great deal of attention to the oath taking practice.<sup>67</sup> Finally, the rebellion was described, but never properly explained.<sup>68</sup>

#### 4.1 Africa as Synonymous

My first claim is that elite news media in the US, which includes *The NYT*, demonstrate structural biases and operating frameworks that perpetuate negative attitudes towards Africa by representing Africa as synonymous with terror, hopelessness, and conflict.<sup>69</sup> A famous example of this was the 2000s cover of the respected *Economist* magazine which declared Africa as 'the hopeless continent'.<sup>70</sup> But to talk about 'Africa', as opposed to its 54 diverse countries, in the context of hopelessness can be exceedingly misleading. These, in turn, fuel the media's crisis news agenda while positive representations of Africa are delegitimized.<sup>71</sup> These structural media biases allow Africa to be misrepresented as the success of colonialism in creating myths and stereotypes, that are difficult to extricate from language and thought patterns, and the structure of the media which makes it difficult to present news from Africa in ways that counter stereotypical ideas.<sup>72</sup> This single negative story continues because the stereotypes and myths that undergirded colonialism have not been challenged by the Western media.<sup>73</sup> This makes it possible for these dominant discourses to rob people of their dignity. In the case of the Mau Mau, it was important for the government and the media to portray the revolt as an isolated event that was actively being suppressed because of the wave of decolonization that was spreading throughout the colonized world.

#### 4.2 Discourse Discrediting the Mau Mau Movement

My second claim is that the British described the Mau Mau as terrorists because they wanted to discredit the Mau Mau since it threatened the British colonial empire. To do so, the British

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<sup>64</sup> Marc Parry, "Uncovering the Brutal Truth about the British Empire," *The Guardian*, August 18, 2016, sec. News, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2016/aug/18/uncovering-truth-british-empire-caroline-elkins-mau-mau>.

<sup>65</sup> "Warning Given to Mau Mau," *The NYT*, December 13, 1964, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1964/12/13/archives/warning-given-to-mau-mau.html>.

<sup>66</sup> "In the Drive to Round Up Mau Mau Terrorists," *The NYT*, October 26, 1952, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1952/10/26/archives/in-the-drive-to-round-up-mau-mau-terrorists.html>.

<sup>67</sup> "The Mau Mau," *The NYT*, September 18, 1952, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1952/09/18/archives/the-mau-mau.html>.

<sup>68</sup> Raymond Daniell, "The Mau Mau Strikes; Raid on Mau Mau," *The NYT*, December 7, 1952, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1952/12/07/archives/the-mau-mau-strikes-raid-on-mau-mau.html>.

<sup>69</sup> Hernandez Benito, S., "Myths and Misrepresentations of Africa in US media: The Truth About The Mau Mau Uprising," 2020, American University: Washington, D.C.: NVivo 12 Coding.

<sup>70</sup> *The Economist*, "The Hopeless Continent," May 13 2000.

<sup>71</sup> Ebo, Bosah. "American Media and African Culture". *Africa's Media Image*. Ed. Beverly G. Hawk. New York: Praeger, 1992. 15.

<sup>72</sup> Bennett, W. Lance. "News: The Politics of Illusion". New York: Pearson, 2009. 40-44.

<sup>73</sup> Harth, "Representations of Africa in the Western News Media: Reinforcing Myths and Stereotypes."

government never recognized the Mau Mau as a liberation movement. Instead, the British government represented them as terrorists, a criminal enterprise, and with links to communism, while never properly explaining the movement.<sup>74</sup> Elite US newspapers saw national liberation movements as products of the communist influence that threatened US interests post-World War II. These representations, in addition to defining the parameters of discourse on national liberation struggles, continued to perpetuate negative views of Africa in the post-colonial period.<sup>75</sup>

The major discourse in the *NYT* coverage of the Mau Mau represents them as a terrorist group.<sup>76</sup> References to terrorism in the *NYT* are frequent in headlines, subheads, and lead paragraphs, which tend to influence the way people read a text.<sup>77</sup> Terrorism appeared in 100 percent of *The NYT* articles that I analyzed. The Mau Mau is presented as an outbreak of terrorism by uncivilized people with no driving ideology.<sup>78</sup>

The British government responded to the Mau Mau movement with propaganda, which was then reciprocated by US news. The discourse focused on long-held fears and prejudices surrounding Africans to create a picture of the Mau Mau as a savage, barbaric movement based on primitive religious practices with no political motivation or basis.<sup>79</sup> Because the Mau Mau did not rely on the written word and maintained secrecy to achieve their goals, both medias were able to exaggerate the barbarism of the Mau Mau and downplayed the use of violence against them, which was deemed necessary to control the movement.<sup>80</sup> The discourse produced by the British and then perpetrated by US news is shown below in Figure 2.

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<sup>74</sup> Wunyabari O. Maloba, "Mau Mau and Kenya: An Analysis of a Peasant Revolt," Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993, 63.

<sup>75</sup> Fair, Jo Ellen. "Are We Really the World: Coverage of U.S. Food Aid in Africa", *1980-1989 Africa's Media Image*. Ed. Beverly G. Hawk. New York: Praeger, 1992. 109.

<sup>76</sup> *The NYT*, "Two Kenya Chiefs Threatened," October 14, 1952; *The NYT*, "Two Kenya Chiefs Threatened," October 14, 1952; *The NYT*, "Kenya Zone Closed to Check Mau Mau," May 30, 1953; *The NYT*, "Mau Mau Stronger, Parliament Told," February 24, 1954.

<sup>77</sup> Werner J Severin and James W Tankard, "Communication Theories: Origins, Methods, and Uses in the Mass Media," n.d., 8.

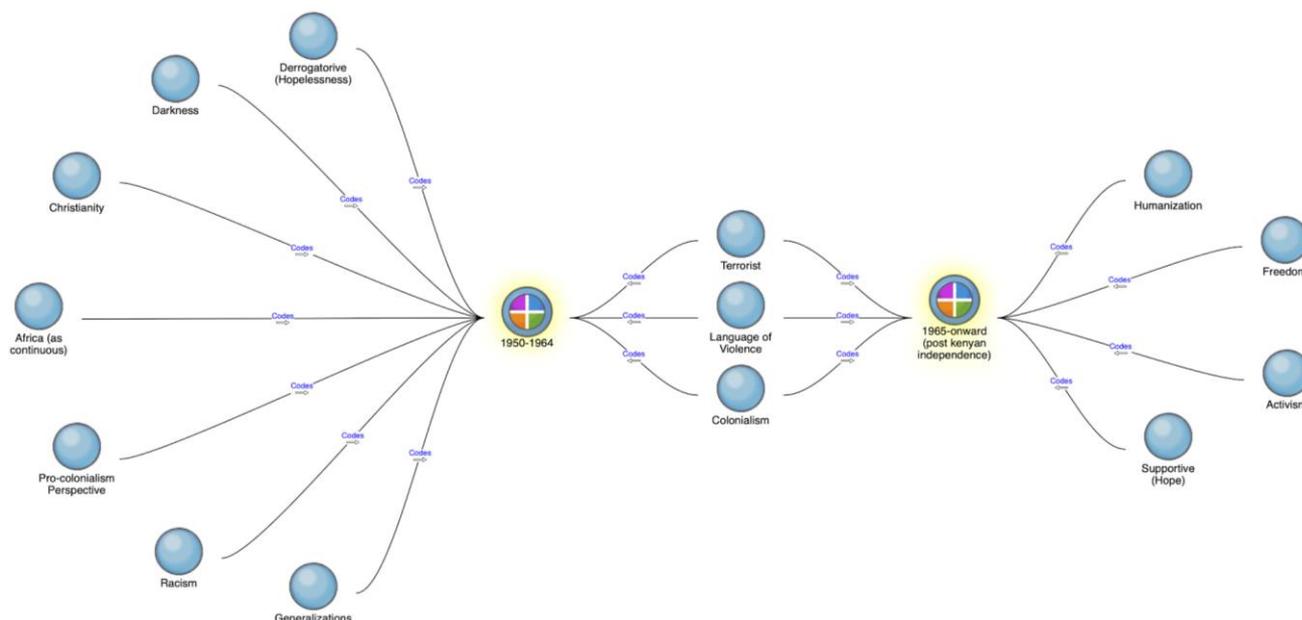
<sup>78</sup> Melissa Tully, "All's Well in the Colony: Newspaper Coverage of the Mau Mau Movement, 1952–1956," 71.

<sup>79</sup> Wanjohi Kabukuru, "The Truth behind Britain's Mau Mau Payout," *New African*, no. 530 (2013): 22.

<sup>80</sup> *The NYT*, "British Worried by Kenya Terror," October 22, 1952.







**Figure 4: Comparison Diagram of Language Used when reporting The Mau Mau Movement during the 50s - 60s (over the course of the movement while it was a British colony) and 1965 - onward (post-Kenyan independence).**

Figure 4 demonstrates two cases in my analysis: the 1950-1964 time period coverage of the Mau Mau movement by *The NYT*, and 1965-onward time period coverage of the Mau Mau movement post-Kenyan independence from Colonial Britain. The role of this comparison diagram is to help visualize the differing or similar representations of the Mau Mau Movement depending on the period. Figure 4 shows how the representations of the Mau Mau movement changed once the British Empire began to fall and no longer had interests linked to Kenya. The nodes shared between the two cases stem from the primary discourses' representations of the Mau Mau. These include: Mau Mau labeled as a 'terrorist' group, Language of Violence when talking about the Mau Mau or Kenyans in general, and the role of colonialism (however, these differed when looking more closely as the case on the left offered a pro-colonialist perspective while the case on the right did the opposite).

## 5. Conclusion

In concluding this paper, I would like to reiterate that in the fight for fair representation it is the role of development educators and teachers amongst others to prevent the objectification of people and places, Africa being just an example. That being said, I do not deny that there are examples of media coverage that could challenge my claims. Another possible challenge to this conclusion is that my study focused on a small number of news articles and did not have full access to the entirety of *The NYT* archives from the 50s, even though these are the contexts in which Africa appears most often, considering the Mau Mau Uprising was in play during that time. However, this suggestion incorrectly assumes that we know what mediated contexts Africa appears in most frequently.

The portrayal of the Mau Mau as terrorists and the British as responsible for restoring law and order to the colony exemplifies a larger ideological discourse about Africans and colonialism. The notion that Africans were primitive, backward people and that the European colonial

endeavor was a civilizing mission was common in America and Europe.<sup>87</sup> This type of discourse has permeated the Western press throughout the colonial period, and is arguably responsible for the current misconceptions about Africa that remain.<sup>88</sup>

Theoretically, observations of Africa have regularly been grounded in the attention to language, discourse, power, ideology, stereotyping, and different characteristics of the critical ethos of postcolonial theory and cultural studies.<sup>89</sup> There is a long-standing critique of Western media coverage of Africa in media and communication studies. Broadly, this critique has been concerned with the perceived failure of Western media to offer a balanced representation of Africa.<sup>90</sup> The occasional coverage of African conflicts is often represented through a Eurocentric and ethnocentric lens, in which the narrative is often distorted or inaccurate. Relying on the assumption that we know what Western media coverage of Africa is like illuminates concerns that academic research becomes “embroiled in the exercise of hegemonic power”.<sup>91</sup>

Discourse, as the formation of knowledge through language, has the power to create a version of history that has lasting influence.<sup>92</sup> In the case of the Mau Mau movement, the dominant discourse was British, who had the power to influence international coverage because most information regarding colonial affairs was filtered through Britain. When considering complex historical events like the Mau Mau Uprising, it is tempting to simplify the situation to make it more understandable, or to attempt to fit it into preexisting worldviews. However, coverage of Africa that oversimplifies events or inaccurately portrays issues leads to the belief that the continent may be beyond understanding.<sup>93</sup>

How does the coverage of the Mau Mau fit into the overall scheme of African coverage? The overwhelming effect of media coverage for the Mau Mau movement was to delegitimize African nationalism and liberation movements, and to define the terms in which to do so. Moreover, the Cold War framework could be employed to rationalize these distinctions. As presented in my analysis, *The NYT* portrayal of the Mau Mau as terrorists, the dismissal of their political motivations, and the focus on delegitimizing the movement made it possible for a lack of key information which was necessary for properly understanding the Kenyan situation. This would have contradicted the discourse. Although I cannot directly say what effects, if any at all, the colonial coverage of the Mau Mau movement had on its readers, it is clear that the texts perpetuated common ideas and misconceptions about Africa that were part of public consciousness.

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<sup>87</sup> Ebo, “American Media and African Culture”; Maloba, “The Media and Mau Mau”; McCarthy, *Dark Continent*.

<sup>88</sup> Beverly G. Hawk, ed., “Africa’s Media Image” (New York: Praeger, 1992); and Hawk, “African Politics and American Reporting.”

<sup>89</sup> Nothias, “How Western Journalists Actually Write About Africa,” 24.

<sup>90</sup> Séverine Autesserre, “Dangerous Tales: Dominant Narratives On The Congo And Their Unintended Consequences,” *African Affairs* 111, no. 443 (2012): 202–22.

<sup>91</sup> Martin Scott, “The Myth of Representations of Africa,” *Journalism Studies* 18, no. 2 (February 1, 2017): 200.

<sup>92</sup> Norman Fairclough, “Media Discourse,” New York: Hodder Arnold, 1995, 55.

<sup>93</sup> Mel Bunce, Chris Paterson, and Suzanne Franks, *Africa’s Media Image in the 21st Century: From the “Heart of Darkness” to “Africa Rising,”* 2016., 77.

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